

If I Falter Let Me Know by **MiinAandeg**

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Summary:

Saving the world is hard. Surviving the aftermath is harder.

If I Falter Let Me Know

Author's Note:

- For [BoywithApple](#).

This is for a very good friend of mine (who loves this show as much as me). I was inspired by a tumblr post about Hopper adopting Eleven (in an AU obv) and then I was locked in a room for 24 hours for medical testing and somehow that made it a lot easier to write this thing. Don't worry, I'm free again and unlike Eleven I was there willingly (tho the last few hours maybe not...)

Title from When It's Cold I Like To Die by Moby.
Comments are loved.

Hopper comes home with an application to fill out. Just a piece of paper and a court case and he'd be her guardian.

"Or parent. Or whatever. Whatever you're comfortable with," Hopper says.

Eleven stares at the form, the text small and blurring together, not that she was really any good at reading. "Do I have to read it?"

"No, it's mostly for me," Hopper says, taking the paper back. "We should probably go shopping now that we know where you'll be permanently. Get you some clothes that aren't just Nancy's old stuff."

It takes Eleven a moment to remember to nod. Hopper nods back and heads into the kitchen. She wraps her arms around her knees and stares out the window.

Eleven wants everything she lays her eyes on in the store. The dresses and skirts are pretty, but the t-shirts and sweaters look comfortable too. She'd felt pretty in Nancy's dress, but sometimes, when the fabric brushed the backs of her calves, all she could feel was iron-like hands gripping her arms and cold tile beneath her feet. In the end, it doesn't matter. She knows it's not really about what she wants.

"Okay kid. This was our second lap of the department. Just pick something," Hopper says. He sounds frustrated, but it doesn't scare her, not when he always sounds frustrated.

Eleven grabs a pair of shorts. They're the type she saw Mike wear once, but Hopper just nods. She narrows her eyes and then strides through the racks of clothes, grabbing whatever attracts her attention for longer than a second and Hopper just follows after her with the same easy-going expression. When she does stop, heart-racing in her chest, he just looks over the pile of clothes in her hands.

"You should probably try some of those on first," he says.

The manic feeling snaps like a rubber band and her eyes burn. She doesn't even know why she's upset.

"Here, I'll carry them."

She lets Hopper take the clothes and follows him to the dressing rooms. Once the door is closed, she lets her shoulders roll forward and covers her mouth to remind herself to stay quiet as she starts to cry. The ugly feeling that sits in the back of her chest doesn't go away. It never does, but crying still feels like a release. By the time she's done trying on all the clothes, the tears are gone. They all fit. She wonders how she'd known.

She doesn't like thinking about that.

"Good eye, kid," Hopper says when she tells him. "So you want all of them or..."

Eleven shakes her head and grabs the things she likes the best. The whole ride back to Hopper's place, all she can think about is how if

she'd wanted, Hopper would've bought her everything. She wonders why.

-.-

"Your new clothes are nice," Mike says over the wind as he bikes them back home.

Eleven rests her cheek on his back. She waits for all four of them after school each day. Hopper says he'll enroll her next year, so for now, she only sees them afterwards and does her best to entertain herself throughout the rest of the day.

"They look like yours," she says. She's not sure of much, but she's pretty sure girls aren't supposed to wear boys clothes.

"Yeah," Mike says. "You're still pretty though."

"Awww," Dustin says, grinning wide and toothless at her.

She sticks her tongue out at him but then smiles.

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Eleven stares at her plate. Her stomach growls but she feels like she's seconds from throwing up staring at the hamburger in front of her. Hopper hasn't noticed yet. He won't if she just eats. She closes her eyes and sees Benny fall to the ground.

It's a small victory, making it to the kitchen sink before she throws up. The feeling at the back of her chest swallows her up as she falls and curls up on the ground. Time passes, a lot of it, and when she opens her eyes again once the dark and panicked feeling has left her, the table is clean and Hopper is sitting on the ground in front of her

with a yogurt cup.

"It's plain. Should get the bad taste out though," he says.

She eats it, slow and careful. Hopper sits and watches, smiling when she finishes before helping her to her feet.

"No burgers then?" he asks.

Eleven throws the empty yogurt cup in the trash. "No burgers."

~.-

Mike's mom doesn't like her. She looks disapproving every time Eleven shows up and looks relieved when she leaves. In some respects, Eleven understands. After all, she's the reason Nancy wakes up screaming, and the reason Will still shivers with three jackets on, and the reason Lucas looks like he's not really there. Still, it hurts to see someone else look at her the way she looks at herself.

It makes her want to lash out.

Once, on her way back to the basement from the bathroom, she stops to look at Karen. Karen stares back from the living room chair.

"You're lucky," Eleven says. "I always have to be around me. I never get to leave."

Karen looks away, but not before Eleven catches the look of shame in her eyes. It gives Eleven a rush at first. But then the feeling in the back of her chest grows and sinks itself into her ribs and she wonders why she didn't keep her mouth shut.

~.-

On days she doesn't work, Joyce takes Eleven to the library. They start with kids books, the ones the five year olds are reading, because she learned some basics but it had never been something she'd gotten a chance to practice. Eleven likes Joyce, but she tries to limit their time together. Joyce doesn't handle silence well. She fills silence with words that sound like nonsense and it takes all of Eleven's effort not to cover her ears.

She likes the books though, and she knows Joyce means well. That's what means well.

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It takes a few months, but after a while, Eleven stops waiting for Hopper to yell at her or hurt her. Even Dr. Brenner hadn't played mind games that took that long to execute. There's something distinctly different between her past and current caretakers, and on the surface it seems obvious, but she knows it's more than just the fact that Hopper doesn't lock her up in isolation when he's mad.

Hopper is like her. They wake up in the middle of the night, plagued by their own demons, and they both take solace in sitting on the porch taking in the crisp night air. He always gives her one of his flannel shirts to wrap up in when they sit in silence on the porch together. She likes the way it hangs, stretching passed her hands. It's like armor.

Sometimes he goes back to sleep before her. Sometimes she falls asleep on the wooden chair and wakes up back in her bed. Other times she'll grab the blanket from the couch and leave it draped over him before retreating to her bedroom.

When Hopper looks at her, it's not with pity or disgust. He doesn't try to fix her like Joyce, or love her through her pain like Mike, and sometimes when she looks at him, she knows that he has it too. The feeling that sits in the back of his chest. With Hopper, she knows she's not alone.